

## Lost in Translation by cosmilk

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**Genre:** Alternate Universe - High School, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Alternate Universe- No Supernatural, Eleven is an exchange student yay, F/M, i suck at summaries

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**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Will Byers & Eleven & Dustin Henderson & Maxine "Max" Mayfield & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

For a whole year, the Wheelers are going to live with a foreign exchange student. Little does Mike know he's going to get pretty attached to this girl.

# 1. The tired girl

## Author's Note:

Okay so this is my very first work on this website, I'm pretty nervous about it!! Especially since English isn't my mother tongue, so I hope there won't be too many mistakes,,

I've chosen El to be French because, well, it will be easier for me, as I am French myself and I didn't want to write something wrong in a language I am not familiar enough with, I hope you'll understand.

Also, I can tell you I won't be able to update everyday cause, well, there's school, you know... Although I try my best to work everyday on this!

I hope this isn't filled with big mistakes, because even if I re-read my chapters a few times to check if I have made any, there still can be some, so sorry if you spot one, and sorry if I butchered the English language.

I hope you liked it! If you have any remarks, don't hesitate to tell me!

Anyway, I hope you'll enjoy it!

## Notes for the Chapter:

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Karen Wheeler was all worked up. She had spent the past few days cleaning the house, not leaving a single spot. She wanted everything to be perfect. Today, she had rearranged Nancy's old bedroom to welcome their new guest. Of course, she made sure her daughter was okay with it -- which thankfully she was -- even if she didn't see any reason why she wouldn't be. Nancy was off to college after all, with a dorm for herself, she didn't really care about her bedroom anymore, she had taken everything she needed and loved. And Karen was glad she did, because it would let their guest feel at home.

The woman also tried to look presentable, so she would make a good first impression on the girl who was going to live in their house for a full school year. So she put on a pretty dress, but not too fancy, to make it look kind of natural. Yet, Karen had gotten her hair done. She also had dressed Holly up, her youngest daughter who was six. Now, she had to convince her son to do the same.

She knocked on the door of his bedroom. Once. Twice. No response. Not a sound. Of course, she should have guessed he would be in the basement, as always. So Karen headed downstairs, trying not to mess up her hair or to wrinkle her dress.

When she arrived at the basement door, slightly open, she sighed. Her son wasn't getting ready at all: he was still playing videogames.

"Michael Wheeler, come here," she said in a tone she wanted to sound authoritative, but she failed, letting kindness slip through.

"What's up, mom?" She simply heard, her son pausing his game and finally looked up at her, standing upstairs in the doorway.

"You know what's going on today, right?" She questioned.

Was there something going on today? Mike kept thinking. It wasn't mother's day, neither it was his little sister's birthday because he remembered offering her that Barbie doll she begged him to buy two months ago. Then a light turned on in his brain. How could he forget this?

"Happy birthday, mom!" he exclaimed.

Karen sighed, looking hurt. "Come on, Mike, my birthday is in February..." She looked down before continuing, "You really don't remember?" Her eyebrow was raised. Mike simply shook his head as a "nope, sorry".

Karen smiled at her son, walking down the stairs to sit next to him on the couch. She looked at him, before messing up his dark mop of hair

with her hand, as Mike groaned.

“You better take a shower and get dressed. We’re going to the airport remember? That French girl is arriving today!”

Mike’s eyes grew wide before he facepalmed himself. Now, he really looked like an idiot. He forgot that someone, who was going to live in his house for nearly a year, would be here. Today. “God, mom, I’m so sorry, I-I totally forgot,” he stuttered, as he got up awkwardly, not minding his game anymore. “I’m going to take a shower and uh-”, he paused, as he studied his mom’s clothes, “what kind of clothes should I be wearing?”

A huge smile appeared on Karen’s face. *Shit* , he thought. “I’ll prepare them for you, or else we’re going to be late! Don’t worry!” She exclaimed.

Deep down, Mike was actually pretty worried. His mom could come up with some crazy ideas. Despite all this, he still thanked her, shooting her a look of gratefulness before climbing up the stairs and heading for the shower.

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After an hour or so spent in the car, the Wheelers finally arrived at the Indianapolis International Airport. And as much to his surprise, his mom picked him an outfit that was actually really fine, and which didn’t make him look like a dork.

As they parked, his little sister, Holly, was jumping in her seat, eager to have a sort of a new sister for a year. He saw his mother was also excited, because of course she missed Nancy, that's why she asked to welcome exchange students, and *teen girls* , more specifically. Because, let's face it, it wasn't with Mike that she could talk about girl things. But Karen also seemed nervous. And Mike was totally mortified. He had totally forgotten about this girl and he was afraid his mom would point it out, and that the girl would immediately hate him and the rest of the year would be awful and awkward. Also, he quite didn't know how to act around girls his age. Yep, it was going to be awkward.

His mom looked one last time in the rear-view mirror, touching up her hair and makeup before finally looking at him and his sister, a bright smile on her face, and saying "Let's go! Let's go meet our girl!"

Holly squealed with joy, jumping out of the car and Mike followed, a little bit behind his mother and his sister, hopping happily as her dress swirled in the warm August air. His mom had a huge sign under her arm which read "Eléonore" in capital letters. That was the girl's name, Mike guessed, but he didn't quite know how to pronounce it, as there were weird things on some letters, stresses, which you definitely didn't get the chance to use daily in the English language. But she was *French* , of course she would have stresses in her name.

He tried to catch up with his mom and his sister, his tall legs helping a lot through the process. The girls were talking about how excited they were to meet Eléonore. With a name like this, he could only imagine a sweet girl. It seemed sweet when he read it.

They finally entered the huge building, and Karen stopped right in

front of a wide screen. His mom studied it, then looked at some paper where she had scribbled unreadable things, her eyebrows furrowed together, a concentrated expression on her face. She glanced once again at the screen and turned to her children, beaming at them. "Okay children! She should be in Hall 2 very soon! We have to hurry!"

Mike swore he never saw his mom as excited as she was at this moment. She walked so fast, almost jogging as her heels clicked on the floor. They headed for Hall 2, his mom took the sign from under her arm, holding it up as she was still walking at a quick pace.

"There we are! She should be here any minute now!" Karen said with excitement.

They waited as passengers came down the hall, luggage in hand, many of them looked like tourists, obviously excited to discover a whole new country. Amongst them were lots of tired faces. Also businessmen, not losing time, almost running to be the first to catch a cab. And then, there were people walking slowly, taking their time, scanning the crowd of people holding up signs, probably looking for their relatives, or a lover, or a friend, and running towards them once they found their name or the face they were looking for, hugging or kissing them, or both.

But as everyone found the people they were looking for, a girl was left alone, in the middle, struggling with her baggages, constantly falling. She looked tired as well, as if she just spent the past day in an airplane. Her brown honey hair fell into sweet curls around her head, it was messed up, but after all, she looked so tired. But the girl looked up, and Mike locked eyes with her.

Her face lit up, as she read the sign above that woman's head. They were here, they were waiting for her, even though she was the last person to get off the plane, because she was still sleeping and it was one of the stewardesses that woke her up. And then, she had some trouble with her baggages. There were three of them, three huge baggages. She had waited for fifteen minutes before all of hers came down on the carousel. And as she made two of them roll behind her, she kept pushing one with her leg, while walking -- or at least, trying to. She was tired, each baggage kept falling to the floor. Again and again. But they were waiting. There were three of them. The woman holding up the sign with her name written on it seemed nice. Long brown hair surrounded her face, she was smiling brightly, as if she was happy to see her. Next to her was a small girl, with long blond hair, who also seemed delighted to see her. And finally, next to this young little girl, there was a guy standing, a very very tall guy, he seemed like he was about her age. Unlike his mother and sister -- she guessed --, he had dark hair, which fell around his face. It wasn't that short, but she liked it, it looked good. He wore a shy smile on his face as he started walking towards her, well, they all did. The young girl was running, coming to hug her. She was so sweet, even though she never met her before. The mother did the same -- except for the running part, although she was walking pretty fast. She hugged her tightly, whispering "welcome" to her. Eléonore smiled stupidly. And finally, the guy approached her, his shy smile still on his face. He looked hesitant though, as if he didn't know what to do. She leaned in, getting on the tip of her toes, kissing both of his cheeks.

"That's how we say hello in France," she simply said as the guy's face turned red. She continued, bowing a little bit, "I'm *enchantée* to meet you, my name is Eléonore, you must be the Wheeler family, right?" she said, mixing English and French, with a slight accent in her voice.

The woman chuckled, before talking, "Yes! I'm Karen, call me by my name, it'll be easier and it won't make me feel old." She laughed once more and pointed at the blond-haired child, now hidden behind Karen's leg, peeking out to look at Eléonore. "And this is Holly! And here you have-," she gestured to the tall boy, "Michael!"



“Yeah, hum, but please, call me Mike,” he interrupted, “when people call me by my full name, it usually means something bad is coming, so...” God, he had such a deep voice.

She shook her head, still wearing that same smile, when she spotted Mike take one of her baggages. She opened her mouth to protest but he beat her to this.

“I saw you struggling earlier, it’s okay,” he chuckled, “plus, you must be tired, so it’s not fair to leave you with all this.”

She whispered a soft “Thank you,” before Mike told Holly to get the smallest baggage. Eléonore was glad she would be with nice people for a year. She beamed as she followed them out of the airport hall.

Yep, she somehow felt like it was going to be a good year.

## 2. Piggyback Ride

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hey guys! I'm back with a new chapter!

First of all I want to thank you all! I didn't expect that much comments and kudos about my story! It makes me trully happy to see you're enjoying the story so far!

Also I'm sorry it took me so long to post, but it turns out I write more while I'm at school and I was sick for the past few days, meaning I didn't write that much because I couldn't sit for 15 minutes in a row without hurting like a b\*tch. Well, sorry, it's me complaining.

Also editing it took me a while, because I write in a notebook first and then I type it on my computer, checking for any mistake and sometimes I add more things, so yep, takes a while.

You probably guessed I'm not good at naming chapters. I'll try to work on it, tho.

But the chapter is out now, yay!!

I hope y'all will enjoy it!!

Mike woke up by the sunlight coming through his window. He squeezed his eyes shut and groaned. He layed in his bed for a few more minutes before he heard the annoying sound he never wanted to hear again: his alarm.

He dismissed it. School. Today. Junior year. Yep, he had to get up to actually get ready and not be late for school. Or else his mom would most likely yell at him, and he didn't want that, not so early in the morning. So Mike got up, yet actually taking *all* his time. He was

simply in his underwear when he headed for the bathroom to take a shower. He liked morning showers, it woke him up. But when he opened the door, he was surprised to see a girl with drenched hair falling all over her face, mouth open wide, with a towel wrapped around her petite body. Shit. He forgot. Again. Eléonore lived with them. And she seemed to like morning showers too. He couldn't manage to say a single word and it looked like she couldn't either. But before all the blood from his brain rushed down, a panicked "Oh my God. Sorry. So sorry. I'm so sorry. S-S-Sorry" slipped from his mouth.

Eléonore mumbled something in French he didn't understand, but Mike didn't hear the end of it as he closed the door right after he sort of apologized for walking in on her.

What the hell had just happened. Suddenly Mike felt like he was *too* hot in his underwear. But instead of bothering Eléonore again, he headed for the bathroom in the basement, which he wasn't used to use. He took a shower, a cold one, because he felt like he needed to be *more* than awoken. He tried to chase some thoughts away from his mind, not letting him concentrate as he ate his breakfast, which consisted of scrambled eggs with syrup on them -- and Nancy always told him it was disgusting, but it's not like he cared anyways. On school days, he always brought Eggos with him, in case he felt a little bit hungry before lunch period -- and he always did.

He took some for Eléonore too. He figured it would be a big day for her, she would need it. And for this first day, he would try to be with her, to show her around and eat with her at lunch so she wouldn't be alone. And he would also introduce her to his friends. Mike was sure Max would be happy to have a girl in the Party, even though she was a tomboy. Also, Mike knew she would easily become friends with Will, because he was quite quiet, just like her. And well, he was also the only one to take French as a foreign language.

Karen drove them to school, wishing them both good luck for their first day, but said “ *Bonne chance* ” to Eléonore, and she chuckled before replying an enthusiastic “ *Merci beaucoup !*”

Mike and Eléonore were walking side by side, silence between them. Congrats Mike, you just made the rest of the year super awkward. Well done, dude. But a shy voice broke into his thoughts.

“Listen... about that morning, and the bathroom... I’m sorry, I should have...” she hesitated, not finding her words.

“Locked the door?”

“Yes! Yes! I should have locked the door! I’ll lock it next time, but I think we should also decide who is doing what in the morning, you see, so we could avoid bumping into each other like this morning...” her voice was smaller at the end of her sentence.

Mike simply nodded, but she was still looking at him with her big brown eyes. He had to talk to her. Quick, Mike, you have to think about something to say. Hurry.

“So, how do you pronounce your name?”

Idiot. You are a big idiot Michael Wheeler.

But she *laughed* , and then *smiled* . So she didn't think he was an idiot? Hooray!

"Well hum, let's try something. Repeat after me. Try to mimic me, alright?" Mike nodded and she proceeded. "Eléonore. Your turn." Her French accent really showed up.

"Hell-hey-honor." Mike scrunched his nose, hearing his own voice. He did it on purpose, messing up the pronunciation of her name, because he knew she liked joking with him. But this time he didn't know if she would take it as a joke. God, he was such an idiot. But Eléonore giggled, not looking offended at all, but rather amused. Mike felt relief spread into his entire body. *Thank God, she doesn't hate me.*

"Let's try something else. You are going to say those words. The first one is Elle," she shot him a look saying "now, repeat."

"Elle! Woah, it's easy!"

"It's just the beginning! Now try to say hey, but like, without the last sound, you see what I mean?"

"Well, this is a bit confusing, but okay. Hé. Elle-hé! I did it!"

Eléonore grinned, but carried on. "Almost there! Now try to say honor, just like you did before. But don't insist that much oh the "h" thought," she raised an eyebrow at him. "Think you can do it?"

“Ay, ay, captain!” Mike said as he stopped in his steps, and stood to attention, a serious look on his face before he broke into laughter. “Okay, okay, let’s calm down. Hum, so... honor, Elle-hé-honor. Arg, nope, sorry captain, can’t do it...”

Eléonore took a look full of empathy before putting her hand on Mike’s shoulder, looking at him right in the eyes, “It’s okay mate! You tried your best, that’s what counts!” Then it was her turn to laugh before she spoke again. “But really, it’s okay. I knew that most people here wouldn’t be able to pronounce it the right way,” she simply shrugged.

Mike felt guilty. “Well, I have a proposition to make: we can give you a nickname, what do you say about that?”

“Sounds awesome!” El was jumping now. “Make a suggestion, come on.”

“Hum, well, I’ve thought of El, because it’s the beginning of your name, you see, and it’s short, so-” but he was cut by a kiss on his cheek as his face reddened.

“Thank you Mike! It’s perfect!”

Mike felt proud of himself and was lost for seconds until he remembered something quite important. School. Shit. They were going to be late. Shit shit shit *shit* .

“El?” he asked, a bit scared, and the urgency showed through his eyes.

She furrowed her brows before whispering a shy “Yes?”

“Late,” was what Mike simply said.

“What?” Arg, of course she wouldn’t get it.

“We’re gonna be late for your very first day in an American High School and we still have to get your schedule and-”

He was cut short by El, who almost screamed “Then stop talking!” And she took his hand and started rushing towards the entrance of the school before she abruptly stopped, laughed and turned to Mike “I think you should actually be the one dragging me around... because you know this school, and, well, *pas moi* .” El stood behind Mike, offering her right hand so Mike could take it.

Mike was wondering what was going on. Her hand. She wanted him to take her hand. And right before, *she* had taken *his* hand. But there was no time to think about it as he saw the semi-worried, semi-impatient look on El’s face. Come on, it’s just a hand. Hold it. It’s simple. *Hold it* .

So he took her hand in his.

Oh God.

No.

Why.

He was sweating.

Why. Was. He. Sweating.

There's no time, Michael Wheeler.

HURRY.

He ran, El behind him, running too but slower. Shit, he shouldn't run that fast. Slow down. But there was no time to slow down. He stopped, facing El, but then turning around and crouched.

"Hop on my back."

"What?"



“Hop on my back, I’m giving you a piggyback ride for free.”

He didn’t even finish his sentence that El was on Mike’s back, slapping his butt and screaming “Go, hobby-horse!”

He did as the lady said and ran as fast as he could. But he still needed to slow down his pace, he was afraid El could fall over. And his pace wasn’t the only thing that needed to be slowed down. His heart rate *too*. It was pounding, *hard*, in his chest. He knew he was bad at PE but he didn’t remember having a heart murmur. Maybe he should run some tests.

But he stopped running all of a sudden, almost falling on the floor, and El *going to* fall on the floor, but he held himself and let El’s feet touch the ground.

In front of him was standing a grumpy old man, wearing a brown suit, obviously not pleased.

“No running in the corridors Mr. Wheeler and Miss...” he looked at El, a questioning look on his face. He seemed to go deep in his mind to somehow remember this student’s name. Dumbass, she isn’t from here, thought Mike.

“Joly,” El finished, wearing her most polite smile.

The principal’s face lit up before replying. “ *Oh, bonjour mademoiselle, bienvenue dans notre lycée* ,” it seemed like he was mocking the French

accent, but El giggled. The principal smiled back at her instantly before duty called him. He coughed and looked back at Mike. "You're nearly late, don't stand here like an idiot. Go."

Well, it seemed like this man just used his "kind moment" of the day.

The bell rang. *Shit* .

"*Merde* ." El muttered. Mike gave her an inquiring look and she went on, "means shit." Oh. It seemed like their thoughts were connected now.

They made their way towards the gymnasium entrance, where everyone gathered on the first day of school and where their names should be called at some point. Mike and El eventually entered it, and, when they opened the door, of course they did it too loudly. Of course they stopped a teacher mid-sentence. Of course everyone looked at them. And *of course* Dustin would be here to shout "Mike! Where were you?" before putting his hand to his mouth, realizing he just had screamed in an entire gymnasium, and the sound of his voice echoed, and then everyone stared at him, and he earned a smack on the back of his head from Lucas, saying "Shut up" between his teeth. Max sighed heavily, probably wondering why she had such *dumb* friends. But then again, next to her was Will, the only one who was wise. That was his nickname after all.

Mike simply hurried to sit next to his friend, avoiding the looks everyone gave El and him. El's hand was gripped in his. Right now, he was secretly glad his group of friends wasn't liked *that much* , because there were plenty of seats to sit on around them. Of course Mike was shot with lots of questioning looks from his friends like "who's this girl?" Yep. Of course he hadn't talked about El to the

Party. He had forgotten to, and he was afraid his friends would tell her. So he had simply kept quiet about her since she arrived, about a week ago. As they sat down, El said a nice hello to them, only increasing the density of their looks. Dustin was about to open his mouth when Mike stopped him by whispering “Later, guys.” And they didn’t say a word, as demanded.

Will and Dustin’s names were quickly called, and when Dustin left, Lucas grabbed Mike’s wrist while El wasn’t looking, too absorbed by watching the students stand up and get their schedules, then leaving.

“Are you finally going to tell us who the fuck she is?” Lucas’s voice was low enough so El wasn’t disturbed, and Max turned to them, interested in whichever answer Mike was going to give.

“Ush! She can hear *and* understand you, well, I think at least...” Mike responded, the last bit of his sentence quite unsure.

“What do you mean you *think* ? Is she out from the madhouse and you’re helping her to escape?”

“No dude, shut up!”

Lucas gave him a look as Max muttered “Stupid” to him. But suddenly, “Eléonore Joly” could be heard in the gymnasium, completely quiet. El got up, looked at Mike, a big smile shining on her face. “It’s me! I’ll see you later! *Salut* !” but Mike grabbed her wrist, holding her back.

“Wait!” He reached in his backpack, holding her out the now all-scrunched Eggos, and she took them, as he continued “In case you’re hungry,” he looked back at the Eggos and added, “they must be like this because of the piggyback ride, sorry... See you later El!”

“Thanks Mike!” and she finally left.

Lucas and Max both had puzzled looks on their faces, completely agape. They stared at Mike, obviously waiting for an explanation. But Mike didn’t know what he could say. Lucas groaned as Mike remained quiet.

“C’mon Mike, *who* is she?”

“She’s a French Exchange Student I didn’t tell you about because I had forgotten about her until a week ago,” Mike murmured.

“Wow, okay,” Lucas seemed to process the information. “But why didn’t you tell us after she arrived?”

“Because I felt like a dick?” That was true. Mike felt really bad and the last thing he wanted was El to know.

“Makes sense,” was all Max said.

“Thank you for being supportive Max.”

“My pleasure,” she grinned but was quickly brought back to Earth when she heard her name being called. “Off I go guys, see you at lunch.”

“Whatever, you’re annoying.”

“Shut up Lucas,” and she stuck out her tongue, giving him the finger too. Lucas was offended now, but it didn’t stop him from talking.

“But really man, I’m sure she’ll forgive you even if she knows about the fact that you straight-up forgot about her. She doesn’t seem like the resentful one.” Mike agreed on this, maybe he was right, maybe she would forgive him if she knew.

“Plus,” Lucas smirked, “you already give each other pet names and you gave her a piggyback ride, s’cute,” Mike let out a snort.

“It’s only a nickname because it’s easier to say than her actual name and we were *late* .”

“Yeah, whatever, seems like bullshit to me.”

“Shut up.”

“Yeah, I get that a lot.” Lucas heard his own name as he finished his

sentence, getting up. “Gotta go now, don’t think too much about *El* .”

Mike groaned as he was left alone in his thoughts and he almost didn’t hear his name being called through the mic.

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He had a shitty timetable. *Great* . Seriously, where on Earth you would tell yourself that it would be a good idea to put a double-period of English class on a Monday morning to begin the week *and* the day with? Jeez. Well, at least it could have been more shitty if he didn’t even share a single period with any member of the Party.

And thankfully, he did.

At lunch period, when they compared their timetables, they realized each of them shared a period with at least one member of the Party, including El. Well, she wasn’t a member of the Party but she would become one. Or Mike hoped so. But El seemed... sad? Or afraid. maybe she didn’t want to be with them. Arg. Well. Mike still approached her and sat next to her because he felt like he had to protect her, like he was her American guardian Angel.

He whispered, because he didn’t want everyone to hear or know that she was feeling down. “What’s going on, El? Something’s wrong?”

She looked up from her plate, her brown eyes looking down immediately as she met Mike’s gaze.

"I'll have to do maths..." she chewed on her fork.

"Well, yeah, everyone has to... What's the problem?"

"I... I... I'm bad at maths!" her voice was higher now, as she let go of her fork. Everyone at the table heard her.

"Well, that makes two of us!" That was Max. She held her fist up in the air, waiting for El to bump it, and she did, while chuckling for the first time since lunch had started. "Smile looks good on you!" Max cheered, which made El grin even more. "I've seen we share the same math period too, isn't it cool?"

"I would like to say it is, but... I'm really... Arg, *je suis trop nulle* !" She now had her head in her hands, pulling her hair.

Everyone was looking worried, not understanding what she had just said. Will was the one to speak up, sitting across the table, chewing on his food. "It means she sucks."

Max raised both eyebrows, turning to Will, "since when do you know French?" She was truly bewildered.

"Since 7th Grade, when you all started learning Spanish," he shrugged, and his lips curved into a smile. "And this year I'm doing French with El."

“Yes,” she bit into her food, before continuing, “but it doesn't change the fact that I'm in real trouble with that math class thingie.”

“What happened exactly,” Dustin enquired, “because it seems to stress you out *quite a lot* .”

“I-It does! Look, here's the thing: when I signed up here, they asked me which math class I wanted to take, and by that I mean which grade. I checked “10” because that's kind of my level *but* I thought that I could stop maths because I was supposed to!-” El was stopped in her talk by Max.

“You can stop maths?!” she seemed excited about the idea.

“Well, in France you can if you choose to follow the literature sector at the end of 10th Grade, which I *did* but it doesn't work like this here, so... I guess I'll have to take maths class... Even though I *suck* at it.”

“You could skip classes,” Lucas suggested.

“Yeah and give a bad image... That's a no, despite the fact that I'd love to.”

An idea popped into Mike's head.



"I could help you! Like, tutor you!" Everyone was taken aback by his interruption.

"Really, you'd do this for me?!" Her eyes lit up at the proposal. She seemed genuinely happy, it lightened Mike's day.

"Well, yeah, of course!"

"And we could help her too, all of-" Dustin began, very enthusiast about the idea, but was cut short by Mike.

"No, no, no, I'm gonna help her!" All eyes were on him. Shit Mike. Think fast. Make up an excuse. Quick.

"She lives at his house, it'll be easier."

Will. The savior. He gave Mike an understanding look and smile, helping his friend with whichever plan he had in mind. But Mike didn't even know himself which plan he had in mind. He simply wanted to help El, as much as he could. And after all, nobody seemed to protest against Will's excuse. He had to return the favor to him. But Mike was brought back to Earth with a hug. El.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," and she kissed him on the cheek. Once again. And his face turned red. Once again. And everyone at the table looked at them in a weird way. Mike coughed.

“That’s what they do, in France.” Mike tried to sound as casual as possible but he only got wide smiles from the Party. And Lucas was mouthing “bullshit” to him, but Mike pretended not to see him. They eventually resumed eating their lunches.

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As the final bell rang, he met El outside the building. She was waiting on the parking lot, as she was told to. Silence filled the air once again, just like this morning, but El was the one to break it.

“The teachers seem all nice, and the students too.”

“It’s only the first day, don’t get your hopes up,” Mike murmured, looking down.

“Hey you,” she chuckled. She had a sweet laugh. “I’m trying to be optimistic!”

“Sorry, I’m number One for ruining the mood...” he laughed back.

She arched an eyebrow. “Really? It doesn’t seem like it though... Guess I’ll have to study you more.”

“Study me?” Mike stammered. This girl was studying him? Wow.

“Hey, not in a creepy way! I simply pay attention to how people act and behave,” she said softly. “That’s why I’m quiet most of the time.” A smile spread through her face. “I want to help people, when I grow up,” she admitted.

“Well, I don’t want to break it to you, but I don’t think you’ll grow up, looks like you’re going to stay this small your whole life,” Mike joked.

El gave him a playful tap on the arm, before biting back, “Shut up, you’re only saying this because you look like a power pole, while *I* am all small and all cute.” She chortled.

Mike pouted at the insult. “Well, I thought you were nice but apparently I was wrong...”

“No. No, I’m kidding, you’re actually cute too.” She beamed at him, not aware of the effect her words just did to Mike.

Mike’s face was as red as blood, but he managed to say a small “thank you,” earning a “you’re welcome,” in return.

After their little talk, Mike’s phone beeped. He took his phone out of his pocket. As he read the text he just received, his face fell and he let out a long sigh.

“What’s with the long face?” El put her hand in a cap-shape against her forehead to avoid her eyes getting hurt by the burning sun.

“My mom isn’t going to pick us up... She had to run errands in another town...” he paused, “we’ll have to walk home.”

“That’s fine, I like walking!”

“But it’s like 90 degrees!” Mike had no idea how she could want to take a walk with this temperature.

“Yeah, well, I don’t know how much it actually is, you know. You guys use Fahrenheit, we use Celsius, so...” she humed.

Oh yes, right, idiot.

“I’m sorry, I-I don’t know how Celsius work.”

“No, that’s fine, you don’t have to be sorry. After all, I’m here to learn!” and she smiled, as always.

They started their walk home and after a few minutes, El spoke up.

“You were right, it’s ridiculously hot,” she puffed.

“Told you,” Mike grinned, a sense of victory spreading through him.

But El spoke again, more softly this time.

“Mike, you know, I’m really grateful that you volunteered to help me with maths. I really appreciate that.” She smiled again. Max was right, smile looks good on her.

Everything seemed to look good on her.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I hope you enjoyed reading the chapter!

Also, I'm on break next Friday so it means more time to myself so more time to write and do other stuff as well. I can't wait.

If you saw any mistake in this chapter, my bad. It's nearly 1 am here as I'm editing and well, I start to get a bit tired, but I wanted this chapter out!!

I might have made some mistakes about how American school works. Even though I did a lot of research, I still can be wrong, so I'm sorry about that :( If I have made some mistakes, please could you tell me which ones and correct me? I'd appreciate it, so I won't make the same mistake twice!

I hope I didn't mess up some common phrases too.

Thanks again guys! And don't be afraid to leave comments, they really brighten up my day!

Bye! -Emma

### 3. Playing Hooky

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Merry Christmas!! Or I hope you're enjoying your holidays if you don't celebrate Christmas.

First of all, thank you for the kudos and comments, as always <3

I'm sorry for only updating now, ugh, I feel bad.

It was a busy week: I had to cook baked goods to bring them at school, I also started reading *The Great Gatsby* (my reinforced English teacher offered it to us because we were studying it and I really plan on finishing it before going back to school!), we had tests at school, etc. (And I also watched *The Office* a lot, but that's a side note)

Also yesterday I was at the other side of the country to celebrate Christmas with my step-family, but now I'm back to celebrate it with my mom's side of family, yay, traveled a lot in 32 hours!! It kinda made it hard to write.

I also forgot to mention something about El's last name: Joly. It's not a coincidence. Actually, I was looking for a last name and Joly happens to be one of the most popular family names in France or something, so it was cool because it was a common name, but what really got into choosing this name is that it is pronounced just like the French word "jolie" which means "pretty". Do you understand now? The inner fangirl in me screamed.

Anyway, it is here now, and think about it like a kind of present from me! Enjoy!

El was waiting in the car, sitting in the backseat, her backpack on her

legs, swinging them as she waited. It was now about three weeks since she had arrived in Hawkins and she liked it so far: she was surrounded by nice people, so everything worked out fine.

However, she noticed how Mrs. Wheeler got in the car, alone, and looking frustrated. Something was wrong, she figured. Something was missing.

Then everything snapped into place.

“Isn’t Mike going with us?”

Mrs. Wheeler—Karen turned around, now looking annoyed. Oh crap. She didn’t mean to feed her up.

“Well, it turns out that *Michael* didn’t get up this morning even though I woke him up many *many* times,” she stopped, letting out a long sigh full of anger. Oh, so that was why she was so often up the stairs screaming Mike’s name in its *entirety*. She went on, once she figured she was calm enough. “So Michael is getting ready at the moment and he will be riding his bike to school, since he *still* doesn’t have his driver’s license,” she shot El a smile, maybe to calm her nerves down. “You can take shotgun.”

Shotgun, what was that supposed to mean, or *be* ?

Karen might have guessed El was clueless of what that was because she kept quiet, so Karen gestured to the front seat next to her. “Here,

darling. I'm sorry, sometimes I forget you're not used to our phrases and... stuff."

And the car finally started, roaring as it drove down the cul-de-sac. The drive was quite quiet, but it wasn't uncomfortable, it was pleasant, and there was nice music on the radio as El hummed the melody, vaguely familiar.

As they finally arrived on the parking lot of the school, Karen looked at El for a moment, as the late one whispered a small "thank you", answered by a bright smile. She reached for the car door, but she was stopped by Karen, pulling gently on her wrist. El turned around, quite surprised, and watched the woman with curious eyes.

"I just wanted to say to you that I'm glad you're here, I mean with us. You really bring something more to the house." She paused, exhaling. "Even if I have two kids of my own living here—for now at least—the house has never been more alive than it had been for years. So thank you, I mean it." Her eyes seemed watery, but El pretended not to notice, as her eyes started to water too.

"Thank you, very much Karen. I really feel at home here." And she really did. Eléonore did not have what you could call a tight-knit family. The worst thing about her family was her father, definitely. She didn't even know if she could consider him as family, but, he was still her father. Still, she didn't talk about it a lot, she was afraid to bother people with it. So El never told the Wheelers, afraid to bother them.

"I'll see you this evening El," she also used the nickname Mike gave her, it was nice to have a nickname for her own. She was about to exit the car but Karen words held her back.



“And that’s a very nice dress you are wearing today El.”

El shot her her most stunning smile, equally as gorgeous as her dress. It was a high-waisted mid-length dress. It suited her well, and she really looked awfully cute in it. She normally didn’t wear dresses but it was still very hot outside, so she decided she’d might wear it as well. She felt really confident in it, and *pretty* .

As soon as El left the car, she walked slowly, appreciating the nice weather of this beautiful Monday morning in September. The birds were singing, and so she was. Well, in her head. It felt good. It felt good to be here, in a country she didn’t know much about, but somehow felt a bit like *home* . She had no idea how she ended up in such a sweet family, who didn’t seem to do all this only for the money they’d get. She heard from other fellow exchange students that some of them had terrible families. So she was glad.

She wandered around the school for a good ten minutes, lost in her thoughts. But she heard a car honking, startling her. Oh yeah. Right. School. Education. She had to go get her things for her first period, arts. It was a nice way to start the week, and she had to be with Will, which she adored. He was quiet just like she was, and didn’t ask much questions. He was simple, and caring, and *wise* . And he spoke French, so she could help him in he needed, and he seemed invested in the language.

El roamed down the hall, looking for her locker. She wasn’t used to it, yet. And the brown-haired girl didn’t know where it was exactly. She used to have Mike with her every morning, and he was the one who remembered where her locker was. She groaned, wishing he was here with her to tell her where to go. He has always been there for

her, and she never felt left behind with him around. She liked his presence, and his ways, him. But friendly. Only. Friendly.

The Party members—she didn't know why they were called like this — were also mild to her, and El was scared at first, breaking into a group of friends like this, but they had been very welcoming. It was nice to have Max around, and Dustin too, he was the funny one. Lucas, on the other hand, was the teasing one. She loved them all, she'd be lying if she ever said the contrary.

But other than them, the whole school seemed to look at her weirdly. She was labeled as the French girl hanging out with the nerds. She also earned many nicknames such as baguette, omelette de fromage, Eiffel Tower. The students here were *very* creative, but she liked the nickname Mike gave her better.

El knew better. She pretended not to understand. It was easier not to care, she had learnt.

As she was examining the row of lockers, hoping to finally find hers, she found herself being pushed against the lockers, or more specifically, she was squeezed between the lockers and a person. When El looked up, a jock —that was the thing the Party called the guys wearing sports jackets, and this guy was wearing one— was looking with an awful grin, which was supposed to be attractive, she guessed. He had wavy brown hair, and blue eyes, but the ice kind of blue. The guy bent down to be at her height —she hated it when people did this, but it was more offensive than kind, really— and she breathed sharply. Both of his arms were placed on both of the sides of the lockers, forming a human cage. She couldn't escape. And the bell had just rang. *Merde* .

“What’s up hottie?” His grin was growing, even more awful than it could possibly be. *Hottie* , what was that supposed to mean? She frowned, unsure of what to say or do.

Seeing her lack of response as she had been staring blankly at him for a few good minutes now, he pouted, or tried to and spoke again. “Aww, you shy, honey?” Honey? What was wrong with people calling her *food* , honestly?

She frowned even more, letting slip out a “I’m sorry...?”

He smirked, finally hearing her sweet voice. His grin grew more vicious, and El was really starting to feel scared. The only thing she wanted now was to find a way out of this, but *how* ?

“Oooh, she speaks! Well, I’ve got to tell you that you’re smoking hot, babe,” he tried to approach her more as she felt drops of sweat roll down her cheek, or were they tears? And this guy got some nerves, comparing her to a pig she’d seen in some movie on tape, when he was clearly hitting on her.

But the jerk didn’t approach her more, as if he was pulled back.

“Dude, what the fuck?” Uh-oh, he sounded really pissed.

When El dared to look up from the ground, she saw Mike, but not the Mike she used to know. It was a *furious* Mike. He groaned.

“Troy, when will you ever learn that harassing a girl isn’t going to make her your girlfriend?” His voice was filled with annoyance, and El’s mouth fell to the floor. It was the first time she ever heard him talk like this to anyone. And she still didn’t believe that Mike just saved her.

“Fuck off Wheeler!” The jock tried to punch Mike, but he was faster. He took El’s hand in his, pulling her to him and running in the now empty corridors as the group of jocks were following them.

She didn’t know where Mike took her but she didn’t really care at this exact moment. Well, sure she was kind of skipping classes, but she was with Mike, so it was okay, right?

They ended up outside, and Mike stopped running, as he leaned against the wall, catching his breath. His hair was wet. Maybe it was from the shower he took or from the marathon he just ran, but it was cute, as his hair was going into many different directions. It caught her breath.

He finally looked back at her, his face still red, and his breath still short-winded too. “I’m sorry for-, coming this-, late-, I-,” El placed her hand on his arm, intimating him to stop talking.

“Mike, you don’t have to be sorry, really,” she chuckled, “thank you, Mike. I mean it.” And she was sincere. He smiled back at her, melting her heart.

He sat down on the ground, letting himself slide down the wall. His eyes narrowed as he looked up at her, the sun forming a halo behind her.

“I could be your full-time knight, you know.”

El cackled. She couldn't possibly have heard *right* .

“My knight?” Tears were pouring down her eyes, as she was still laughing.

“Looks like you need to be protected against the big meanies, milady.” He bowed down his head, doing the matching gesture with his hands.

He was so sweet. And good.

“Fine, be my knight,” she held her hand down for him to grab it, and he did, getting up, now taller than her. “Show me around, would you?”

Mike scratched the back of his neck, looking nervous. “You're, uh, you sure you don't want to head to class?”

Class. All he was thinking about were classes. She rolled his eyes at him playfully. “Mike, it's like 8:40, we're basically skipping now. So why don't we walk around the school for now? We'll head back to

class later, I promise.”

He seemed not to give up, so she used her biggest weapon. Her puppy eyes. There was no way he could resist those. Mike looked tense, falling for the trap, but not wanting to give up. But she heard him exhale, and she knew she just *won* .

“Fine, I’ll take you on a tour,” El jumped on her feet, but Mike stopped her. “ *But* , it’s only because I had a double-period of English and you have to be insane to actually survive this.”

El looked at him suspiciously. Nope, she wasn’t buying that lie. “It’s not even because of the puppy eyes?” Her eyebrow was up. He had to tell the truth, so she could really win this little game.

His mask fell down, as he was fully exposed now. “Well, a little tiny bit.”

“If you say so,” she smirked and she followed him, walking next to him as they began walking around the school.

He was good at playing guides, and she couldn’t stop laughing as he made up fake hoary stories about the school building: it was haunted by the souls of the people deceased here, the school being a former asylum, itself built on an old Indian cemetery, or Mike said so.

“It is said that if you go in room 147 at night time,” he lingered a bit on the last words, “you can still hear her voice whispering maths

formulas to you,” Mike bent towards her, his mouth close to her ear now, and he whispered, his voice dramatic, “sending shivers down your spine.”

El faked a scream, holding her face in her hands, as her mouth gaped, and she faked fainting. He grabbed her before she completely fell to the ground and they stared at each other blankly, faces so close. But El broke into laughter, and so did Mike. They both stopped abruptly when they heard footsteps approaching, fear now icing their blood. He didn't think twice and took her hand, getting her up quite roughly, and shoved themselves in the nearest janitor closet. They both covered their mouth with one hand, holding their breath. The footsteps became closer and louder, and El was honestly scared to death, afraid someone could see them through the window, even though the closet was dark. The principal's frame could now be seen, and that was this exact moment Mike chose to speak again.

“Seems like we're lucky today! We now can observe a very rare mummy, seen many times wandering around the school, desperately in search of student's knowledge —a rare commodity—, the only thing being able to keep him alive. Looks like he's not far from the end...” Mike's voice had been serious through the whole speech, not once flinching. When he looked back at El, she was biting her fist, and her eyes were shining in the dark, due to the tears filling them. She was smiling behind all the biting and crying.

“Whoa hey stop! Don't hurt yourself!” He sighed, “Being funny is hard...”

He wore a smug look, and spied through the window, exhaling as the principal was now nowhere to be seen. “You can laugh, now.”

And she did. “God, Mike,” she was still feeling overwhelmed by all this, “why are you-, you’re good at telling stories.” El was looking at him, a serious face. “I’m being honest here, h-how come?”

Mike’s cheeks flushed, “Well, I am the Dungeon Master of this game called Dungeon & Dragons-,”

“Oh, this is the game Dustin won’t shut up about!” She paused, feeling guilty because she cut him in his talk, “hum sorry, go on.”

“Yeah well, in D&D I’m kind of the storyteller, and I’ve written campaigns since we were like, seven? So it may be why I’m good at telling stories?” He simply shrugged, trying to sound nonchalant. “But, thank you, El.”

“You’re welcome,” she beamed at him, and the bell rang as students now filled the corridors, El put her hand on the doorknob, meaning to open it and getting out of this tiny closet, but Mike stopped her, looking *stressed out* .

“What is it now? The students turned into zombies and if we go out now they’ll bite us and eat our brains?”

Mike cracked up, holding his ribs as he laughed, his stress now completely forgotten. But he tried to focus, clearing his throat. “No, hum, actually, if we go out now, they’ll think we just had... funny business, in here.” She didn’t get his point. They *were* having funny business, right? Mike seemed worried now, “Oh, maybe you don’t know what funny business is...”



“Well, I know what funny means, *thanks* . And I know what business means too, I know I’m here to learn and stuff but when I ended up here with some vocab so... don’t underestimate me Mike, please?” She pouted, insisting on the last word of her sentence.

But Mike gulped, he had to explain it to her, he had to, so she could avoid learning about it around other people, and she could avoid embarrassment. If she had to be embarrassed learning the truth, he’d rather want her to be with him.

“Funny business isn’t... laughing, at all. Funny business is...,” he tried to think a way to put it into words, but he couldn’t. He *couldn’t* . Now she gave him an impatient and curious look, he had to answer anyway. “It’s nothing, really, nothing important.” He tried to sound convincing, and he was afraid he failed. But El shrugged. Whew, he made it.

“Let’s just wait here for a moment, ‘till everyone gets back to class, I don’t want to go to that stupid English class anyways,” he half-smiled. It wasn’t the only reason he was skipping, he knew it, but he wouldn’t admit it. Yet.

“I guess I’ll have to stick with you one more hour, then...” she faked exasperation, crossing her arms against her chest and sighing loudly, but giggled eventually.

So they sat there, waiting a few more minutes before getting out and spending the rest of the period talking about everything and nothing. It felt nice for both of them, as they got to know each other a little bit more—knowing what was each one’s favorite book, or movie, or

band, or TV Show, or food. And it felt nice, and right. Just lying on the green grass, head against head, skygazing, and resting a little bit after all this running. But too soon, the bell rang, and they had to separate to go to their respective classes.

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They met again at lunch, as they sat in front of each other, smiling at each other because only them knew about their little journey this morning.

Lucas, who was sitting next to Mike felt like something was up, looking at them curiously. He was thinking of a way to annoy the hell out of Mike when Will spoke up.

“El,” he took a bite of his food, “where were you this morning? I didn’t see you in Arts.”

El’s face turned white, and she murmured something under her breath. Mike was the one to reply, instead of her.

“We were late.”

“No, *you* were late, not her.” Dustin was throwing some food at Mike now. “I saw your mom’s car this morning, and El was inside. Not you though.”

“Okay well, *I* was late. Fine. You happy now?” He was starting to get cranky. Lucas decided it was the right moment to intervene.

“Actually, no.” Mike turned to look at him, obviously annoyed. “You see, the fact that you were late doesn’t explain you two missing the first two periods.” He had said that calmly, knowing it would make Mike bluster. And it did, he was now looking at him with angry eyes. Lucas smirked.

El had her face down and kept quiet. But she couldn’t just let him take the blame for her.

“He helped me with some stuff,” she didn’t want to tell them in details, she still felt kind of ashamed. All eyes were on her now, so she had no choice but to say a little bit more, still avoiding the main issue. “A-And the bell had rang, it was already so late that I asked Mike to give me a decent tour of the school.” She smiled now, remembering his silly stories. “We kind of ended up locked in a closet because the principal wa-”

“Locked? In a closet?” Max screamed as food fell off her mouth. “What did you guys dooooo?” Her blue eyes were dancing and she had a playful grin.

Lucas was thankful Max thought a bit like him, asking the question he didn’t want to bother El with. He’d rather bother Mike with it.

El looked disconcerted. Why did they want to know so badly? There

wasn't anything special about being locked in a closet, really. "Nothing at all?"

"Bullshit," Lucas pointed his fork at both Mike and El. "I bet you guys had some..." he lowered his voice, bending towards them, "funny business." He paid close attention to their reactions, and was surprised to see that Mike turned really red and was shaking his head, whereas El didn't seem to be concerned. Weird.

"G-Guys I promise it's not what you think it is," Mike stammered. "Don't bother with this," he was about to say something else but he heard a loud sound, and the next thing he saw El's face in her plate, Troy standing next to her, pulling her hair and getting some mashed potatoes on his hand. Everyone at the table, and also everyone in the room looked at them, eyes and mouth open wide, quite taken aback, while some guys ooh-ed and aah-ed, and some laughed. Now Mike was enraged. And everyone at the table could sense it.

"That's for being a bitch," Troy spit, and then he murmured to her ear, "*bon appétit*."

He was about to walk away, making his way past Mike. Terrible idea. Mike tripped him. He landed over, hitting his chin first, and then his whole body, making a loud thud. There were "ooh"s and "aah"s again, some laughter too, louder this time because the biter had just been bit back.

Troy got up, not without aching with pain, his face distorted in a bizarre grimace. His nose was bleeding, and so was his chin. "You are so dead, Wheeler!" He shrieked, and tried to punch Mike, once again, but some wrestlers held him back, and now he was looking like one enraged dog barking.

Max took advantage of the situation to grab El's hand and dragging her to the girls' room, leaving the guys at the table, still startled by what just happened.

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Max wiped off the last bit of mashed potatoes that was still on El's face with a wet tissue, and cracked a small smile. "And *voilà* , you're done, as clean as new," she earned a smile back from El, whose face was still red from crying, yet she looked delicate, like a flower, or any beautiful but fragile thing the nature can create.

"Thank you, Max," she sniffled and turn to look at her reflection in the mirror. She looked less like a mess than she did a few minutes before, and all of this thanks to Max. But her nice dress was now soaked wet, see-through and totally ruined.

" *Connard* ." That was for Troy.

"Uh?" Max hadn't got it, and you could see it on her face.

"It's French for asshole, or douche, or... lots of words actually," she chuckled, wiping a tear away. "God I hate this guy."

The redhead glared at her. "Troy?" El nodded, and she continued,

“Yep, he’s a piece of shit, or “ *connard* ”, like you said.” The two girls broke into laughter at the attempt of Max trying to speak French, but Max seemed worried now. “El, what happened exactly? I mean, there must be a reason for him to call you a bitch,” El looked down. “Oh my God, n-no, no, I didn’t mean that El!” She facepalmed herself, “I’m not good with words... El, he *is* the bitch, you’re not, ‘kay?” She gave her an half-smile, “now tell auntie Max *everything* .” Max had used the voice of a grandmother, and it just made El grin widely.

“Well, you see, this morning he was basically hitting on me, and he was very... pushy. Mike saved me. That’s it.”

All excitement left Max’s face, “Well, I thought there would be more, but anyway, that might have been enough for him to call you a bitch, I guess...” But suddenly, she was all alert again. “Buuuuuut,” she was saying this for too long, El was anticipating her next words with a mixture of fear and elation. The waiting was done when Max finally said the rest of her sentence: “what did you guys do, uh?”

Max’s eyes were glowing with frenziness. She had to think of a quick response which would satisfy her friend, otherwise she was sure she’d cut her throat, right here, in the girls’ bathroom.

“Like I said, he showed me arou-,” she was abruptly cut.

“God, I already know this! I want to know more, like,” she whispered, “what happened in that closet, uh?” She had both eyebrows raised, “Funny business?” El shook her head in response, because they hadn’t been doing that, at least that’s what Mike said. Max seemed disappointed in her reply, letting out a small “ow, shoot...”

Finally, El asked the question she was dying to ask, and to get a decent answer, at last. “Max, what is... funny business?” She was convinced Max would tell her the real truth.

Max seemed surprised by El’s question, as her brows were now furrowed together. “You don’t know what funny business is?” El shook her head, implying that, no, she didn’t what that was. “Okayyyyy,” Max had her fingers on her temples now, thinking, “well, usually, funny business is like, making out, or any intimate relations really, but not necessarily sex,” she gave El a concerned look, “do you understand?” She was afraid she’d used words she didn’t quite mastered yet.

“Okay,” was all El said. She seemed to sense it, at least, so Max let out a relieved sigh. “But yeah, to answer your question, we definitely didn’t do... *that* .” Her face turned red at the thought. Now she understood what Mike had meant when he prohibited her to open the door.

“El, you know, I think he likes you, you see?” As she saw El’s confused face, Max was about to speak again when the bathroom door opened, letting Mike come in. El instantly crossed her arms on her chest since her dress was still pretty wet. Shit, wrong moment.

He had his hand in his pockets, a bothered expression on his face. “Are you feeling any better?” He seemed really sad. And he was. He felt like all of this was his fault. Because if he hadn’t given Troy shit this morning, he wouldn’t have been mean to El. But then again, if he had done nothing this morning, he would’ve felt sorry for the rest of his poor life. So perhaps it was his fault, but God knows what would have happened if he had done nothing to stop Troy. He noticed El’s

red eyes and face, making it obvious she had cried, quite a lot, even.

“Yeah, I am. Max is awesome,” she smiled, and he felt a little better. “And thank you, about earlier.”

He grinned, “Nah, it’s nothing, he just got what he deserves.” Mike thought of something he wanted to ask her. “I-I could take you home, I mean, if you’d like to, because I bet you don’t have any spare clothes and you don’t feel like attending classes this afternoon, so...”

Max cleared her throat, reminding them she was also here. They both looked at her, but she gestured for them to continue talking. She just wanted them to know they weren’t alone. And she had unsettled them, and she felt kind of proud. El looked back at Mike to answer him.

“Well, hum, I’d like to, but...” she hesitated, “you don’t have a car...”

“I’ve got my bike, don’t worry!”

It was too much for Max, she broke, earning both pair of eyes on her. El smiled, but Mike looked hurt. God this guy was beyond funny.

“Mike,” she paused, still awfully laughing, “are you really going to give her a ride home on your *bike* ?” Tears were pouring down her face, and her face grew red, she didn’t look like she’d stop any time soon.



“Yes.” Mike’s reply was a bit harsh, “I-I’m sure we both fit on my bike,” he was trying too hard to find arguments to convince Max, and well, El too.

“Pf, if you say so,” Max was still crying, happy tears of course. “Princess, what d’ya say?” She had turned to El, waiting for her answer.

Her face was red. She saw the “argument”, and she didn’t know why Mike was insisting so much on taking her back home. And she didn’t understand why Max was like this with Mike. It was kind of him, to care like this, and she clearly appreciated it. He’d do so much to help her out.

“I’d really like to go home... please Mike.” Her voice was small, and she didn’t dare to look at him in the eyes, so she rather looked at Max, who wore a smug look. Why? She lost the argument, didn’t she?

“Follow me,” he turned towards Max, “see?” She simply shrugged back, still wearing that confident attitude. She waved El bye, and she did too, muttering thank you one last time before she felt Mike dragging her out. They exited the school, and headed for the place Mike had locked his bike.

When El wanted to hop on the bike, Mike stopped her, handing her a jacket. She eyed with interest. “You dress is still wet, I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable, so wear it,” he had that warm grin, and she couldn’t help but smile back. She accepted his jacket and put it on, feeling much less awkward now. It smelt like laundry detergent, the one Karen used to wash her clothes, body wash and a little bit of

sweat, but everything mixed up smelt *so* good. She felt herself melt into the jacket, closing her eyes and trying to picture the odor.

“Now you can take a seat,” it had startled her, but El did as she was asked. He sat before her, and she held him close, her arms around the area of his stomach. She didn’t want to fall over, and she didn’t want to let go. It was agreeable to have someone that close. She rested her head on his shoulder, her breath tickling his neck as she got lost once again in the smell.

Mike tried to ignore the warm feeling against his neck, and his back, and his whole body. He had to focus on riding his bike, it was hard but he had to, for the sake of El. And before they knew it, they were in the alley. They got inside the house, happy to be home earlier nonetheless. But their happiness was short, as a voice stupefied them.

“What are you two doing here so early?”

Shit. It was Karen. She was home and not running errands. Mike slowly turned to face her, gulping as he took in consideration the angry look his Mom wore.

“Hey, mom-,” he started, but was cut short.

“Why aren’t you at school?!” Ouch, she was really fed up.

“I can explain, mom, I swear,” he tried. El was looking at the ground, ashamed. Mike was getting in trouble for her. She didn’t want this to

happen. She was ruining everything, as always.

“You think so? Try me.” She was talking calmly, yet her voice was still bitter. El took advantage of this to run to her room, which was upstairs. She couldn't bear this. She left behind two shocked people. Mike tried to follow her but she closed the door to his face. She was already crying and she wanted to be left alone for now.

“El, wait... I'm going to explain it to her, she'll understand... Then I'll come back to you.” There was a pause behind the door, and he heard her sob. “I promise.”

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Mike climbed up the stairs, not too loudly but still wanting to be as fast as possible. He had talked with his mother, and just as he expected it, she understood, and she also felt terribly sorry. He knew his mom too well.

As he arrived in front of El's door, he knocked slightly, but he didn't get any answer back. So he knocked a little bit louder this time, but it was the same. So Mike opened the door, feeling a little bit nervous, not even knowing why.

He pushed the door ajar, and saw her curled on her bed. She was asleep, of course.

Mike looked around the room, now realizing how much it changed since his sister, Nancy, had left for college. Just like his sister, El was a neat person, her things well organized. She had put her laptop on her desk, and thrown her backpack on the floor, so some textbooks had fallen on the floor, but Mike assumed it was simply because she hadn't been well. He oscillated before sitting on the double-size bed, making El move a little bit in her sleep. He didn't want to wake her up, but he had to. So he shook her gently awake, his hand caressing her shoulder. She moved a bit, and he noticed she was holding his jacket like it was a blanket. Mike found it so cute, and couldn't help but smile. When he thought she couldn't get any sweeter, she found a way to eventually.

El groaned as she jerked awake, her cheeks feeling weird after all this crying, and her eyes were tired even if she had just slept. She wanted to close them again, and sleep forever. But she heard her name being called, a deep warm voice, which was reassuring. Maybe she'd wake up.

When she finally dared to open her eyes, she was surprised to see Mike looking down at her, a charming smile on.

"You're awake," he stated. Now he had the same worried look he had earlier, at the girls' room. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," she managed to beam. Now he was fully grinning, obviously content she was feeling better.

"Look, my mom says she's sorry," El felt bad, but she heard him continue, "and she's gonna call Troy's mom, they're good friends actually, who knew?" Mike was laughing once more.

“Good.” She giggled, but she was concerned about him. “What about you, did your mom scold you a lot?”

He shrugged, always that same shrug. He lied on the bed, both of his hand now on the back of his head. “Nope, well, the usual like “tell me if something like this happens, you know it’s hard handling three kids on my own, blah blah blah”, it’s nothing really, I’m used to it.”

A question was on the tip of El’s tongue, but it didn’t come out. So instead Mike was the one to ask his question.

“You don’t have a dad too, don’t you? I mean you never talk about him, you always talk about your mother,” he paused, “I’m sorry if this is inappropriate, you-you don’t have to answer.”

Mike had told her over the past few weeks that his parents got divorced soon after his little sister’s birth. His mom had full custody, which was nice according to Mike. Apparently, his dad never cared that much: he was either working or sleeping, or giving Mike shit because he wasn’t good at sports or didn’t act enough like a man. Incidentally, Karen always took Mike’s side, annoying his father. And one day, after a violent fight, he packed his things and left. That was it. End of the story. He had told her so much, with no filter at all, she felt like she owed him. And she didn’t mind telling him. He was her friend.

“My dad wasn’t here that much too when I was young,” she had a smile, even though she knew it was a hard topic for her. “He was always at work, or so he said, and he didn’t really know me. My mom got annoyed, so she packed her things and left, just like that,” she

snapped her fingers, “but she was the one to have full custody. I mean, I saw my father once a fortnight.” She paused, continuing, swallowing her feelings. “He was violent sometimes, actually, once he burnt my hair,” *and other things* , but she hid her tears with a laugh. “But he was so overprotective. I wasn’t allowed to do anything, or even have a boyfriend... I’m his only child, his only daughter, I guess he wants to preserve my innocence,” she looked at Mike, for the first time since she’d started talking. His face was white, and you could sense he was sorry just by seeing his eyes. El gulped, and carried on, “I haven’t seen him since, a year...?” She seemed to think. “Yeah, a year. And being here, in a foreign country is kind of a way for me to escape him...” She lied down too, next to Mike, and looked at him. “That’s kind of it, it is the short version,” a tear fell down her cheek, hitting the fabric. Now she was crying in front of him. She felt sad, but also *relieved* . Yes, she felt relieved because she just told someone she trusted about her past. She didn’t talk about it so often, only a few people knew, and it always felt good to talk about it, but she was afraid to. Now she couldn’t hide the tears, as the pillow was soaking wet, and she was sobbing: she couldn’t stop crying. She felt useless, not loved by her father, lacking a father figure, lacking *someone* . She wasn’t complete, she was a mess. She had issues and she kept running away from them. She knew it wasn’t the right thing to do, but there wasn’t anything she could do, really. But El felt warm arms closing around her. Loving arms. That was Mike. He took her against him, not minding that she’d ruin his shirt, holding her close. He comforted her, doing smoothing movements with his hand on her back. She was crying, but Mike somehow managed to calm her breathing, now regular and sleepy. El nuzzled into his neck, slowly falling back to sleep.

“I’ll be here. I’m here. I promise.”

### Notes for the Chapter:

And here it is!! I hope you enjoyed it.

It was hard to write El's last "speech", because I relate a lot, let's say it like that.

Also, Karen and Ted are divorced because even in the show, it doesn't look like they're in love, and even Nancy says it. And now when two married people don't love each other anymore, they divorce, right? Or at least that's what most of them do.

I'm sorry if my English seems repetitive and not that rich. Lately I've been taking meds which make it hard to concentrate as I get sleepy very easily, and even my English teacher noticed my English wasn't as good as before. So I try my best to look for other words to say a word instead of another, that's actually what takes me so much time. Sorry again.

I don't know when the next chapter will be up, but soon enough I hope. But I'm on vacations so I intend to rest a little bit too!

Anyway guys, thank you for reading and leaving kudos and comments, you're the best!

Enjoy your holidays! -Emma

## 4. Bon appétit

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hello guys!! First of all, happy new year! I wish you health and happiness!!

And I want to thank you for all the kudos and the sweet comments, you're awesome!

I'm sorry this chapter is late :( It was hard to write lately, as family was over and also, my medicine is fucking me up so bad, I can hardly think anymore, it's hard.

But here it is! I know it is short, and not that good, but I wanted to update before school starts again!

I hope you'll enjoy reading it!

A clicking sound coming from downstairs woke Mike up with a jolt. He took a glance at his digital alarm clock on his nightstand: it read 4:37. He wasn't that much of a heavy sleeper, so pretty much any sound in the house could wake him up, even the lightest ones. He groaned and tried to get a little bit more sleep, closing his eyes and shoving his head in his pillow, only to hear the clicking sound once again. He cursed himself for having acute hearing. Mike laid there for what felt like hours when he decided it was high time to take a look at his clock: 4:42.

No.

It couldn't have been *only* five minutes.

Clicking sound. Again.



Normally his mom wouldn't make that much noise when she drank a glass of wine in the night. She had the habit to do this, especially after her divorce, but she had stopped a few years ago, so Mike found it odd that she was getting at it again. He should probably check on her, making sure she wasn't completely drunk and destroying her so beloved kitchen.

He put a shirt on, as October was near its end, and it was starting to get a bit chilly even in the house because the heaters weren't on yet, his mom claiming that "it's not necessary", and that they'll "turn them on in November". So he made his way to its kitchen, where the sound was coming from, only in his boxer shorts and his stupidly not fitting t-shirt, with the Ghostbusters logo printed on.

The light was faint, and he heard even more noise, but it definitely didn't sound like glass and bottles clicking. Who the hell was in his kitchen?

Mike yawned as he entered the room, "Mom, what are you doing?" He still thought his mom was in the kitchen, because who else would be there?

A plate hit the floor and a slight scream escaped the woman's lips, as she turned around. "*Tu m'as fait peur!*" She looked terrified, her eyes open wide. Nope, it wasn't his mom: it was El.

"C'mon El, it's not even five in the morning and you expect me to understand French?" His eyes were narrowed and he had his ears covered, wincing as Mike wasn't pleased to each such a strident sound so damn early.

She had an apologetic look on her, and she gazed to the floor, whispering, “you scared me...” She looked up at him, now worried. “You okay? I woke you up?”

He wanted to put his hands in his pocket—to look relaxed—but as he did so, he remembered he had *no* pockets. His face turned red and he quickly crossed his arms on his chest, before El could notice he just put his hands in his pants. Mike cleared his throat, now looking at her straight in the eyes. “Yeah, I-I’m fine and yes you woke me up...” He saw her face turning sad, like she did something really bad, so he hurried, saying quick words. “B-But it’s no big deal!” Mike moved his hands in rapid gestures to support his argument. Seeing she wasn’t so relieved, he carried on, “I wake up at any sound so... It’s okay? I guess,” he wasn’t so sure about his last sentence, but now she seemed convinced, as she nodded in understanding.

Mike realized he still didn’t know what she was doing in his kitchen so early in the morning. The counter was covered with flour, and butter, sugar, milk and other ingredients. She was obviously cooking, but what? He decided he’d ask. It wasn’t like she was doing something secret anyway, right? So Mike gestured to the mess she had created, a questioning look on his face, and she smiled at him guiltily, before he spoke up again. “So, care to tell me what you are baking?”

“Pastries,” she beamed even more, “well, *croissants* and *pains au chocolat*, more specifically. And also some cookies in case you don’t fancy pastries,” she looked down at the amount of dough that laid on the counter, in different mixing bowls. There were two of them, filled to the top, and Mike was truly astonished: how could someone so tiny make that much dough? Because let’s face it: she was so little.

“All of this? Y-You made all of this?”

“Well, yeah, I mean what would have been the point if I just bought them already made, you see?” She simply shrugged, like it wasn’t a big deal, but it *was* , at least to Mike.

“El, t-that’s awesome!” He looked amazed by all the batter in the mixing bowls, wanting to taste each of them, but he quickly focused again, clearing his throat. “Since when are you doing this?”

She covered her mouth with the back of her right hand as she yawned a bit, before replying sleepily, “Woke up at 3:45 am.”

She was that dedicated? She had been up for more than a hour, and she had done all this, by herself.

“You need any help?” He had blurted out the sentence without thinking about it, and he regretted it, because it might have sounded rude, as if he thought she was not doing a good job at this, but his doubts went away when he saw a smile growing on her face, and she seemed happy that he volunteered. She handed him his phone, and he took it without questioning, and when he glanced at the screen, he realized it was all written in French.

“I’m supposed to read this?” He didn’t understand French, not at all. Once, he went through Will’s French notebook, and as hard as he tried, he couldn’t decipher a single thing from this language. But right now, he lamented taking Spanish instead of French.

“Yeah! It’ll be fun!” She puppy-eyed him, knowing he couldn’t resist them, “you said you wanted to help, Mike, pleaaaaase?”

“Fine,” he sighed, not exactly knowing how he would manage to read it right. He cleared his throat, feeling a bit nervous. “Ram-Ramolyer?”

“ *Ramollir* ,” she quickly corrected, but it sounded like ramoleer, just like when she said Will’s name: she actually said *wheel* every time. Mike found it cute though. Her accent was cute, even if it was less present that it had been when she just had arrived; but it still remained in some words, Will’s name for instance.

“Well, uh, *ramollir* ,” he got it right! He shot El a smile as a sign of victory. “ *Ramollir le beurre ?*” He exaggerated the accent, but at least he was right once again, as she smiled at him. He smiled back, before finishing his sentence, “Ahuh?”

“ *Au* , but you have to read it like o, weird uh,” she said, not looking up from the butter she was cutting to small pieces and putting in a bowl, but she eventually did, speaking again, “ *au* what?”

“Micro-ondies,” she giggled, and he quickly corrected himself, remembering Will studying French and ranting about s’s you don’t have to pronounce and e’s which sounded more like bizarre uh’s. It might be one of them. “ *Micro-ondes* , sorry.” His eyes went wide, “that’s microwave! That means microwave, right?”

It only caused El to giggle even more, while she pushed the buttons of the microwave. “Yes, that’s right! But don’t be too excited, there

are like tons of words sounding alike and written with the same roots, you'd know if you studied Latin. Like the dead language, I mean."

Mike only nodded, wondering if there was a thing this girl didn't know. He continued reading the recipe to her, and he watched her moving around the kitchen, helping her when she had the mix the whole thing together. But when they both wanted to taste the dough, they ended up eating most of it, and in the end, there wasn't enough cookie dough for five cookies. But she promised she'd eventually make some in the day.

It would only be pastries this morning, but they didn't mind at all. They still had Eggos in case anyone didn't like it.

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"Guys, I think I finally have an idea for the Science Fair."

The three boys looked up at Mike. The four friends were in Mike's basement, eating what was left of the pastries El had made this morning. They were supposed to work on their Science Fair Project, but they couldn't think of anything, so instead they just did their homework, or read, or did nothing much at all. They were rather startled by his speech, and you could notice Dustin quickly wiping a trail of drool off the corner of his mouth behind his comic book. Seeing that no one spoke up, Will did.

"What is it?"

Mike was grinning so hard, and his dark eyes were shining as the excitement grew inside him. "I-I thought we could make a kind of device that could translate live! Like if someone was talking to me in another language right no-"

"You mean if El was talking to you in French whispering soft words?" Lucas had his eyebrow raised and saw Dustin grin, as they were both awaiting for Mike's answer whereas Will simply rolled his eyes and tried to hide his smile, so his best friend wouldn't know he was thinking that Lucas had a point. Mike's face turned red but tried to not show it, ignoring his last comment.

"No , I'm simply saying it could be great to understand what the world is saying!" He was too excited, and his words came out of his mouth way too rapidly for the other boys to reply right away. Lucas shrugged before laying in his seat, throwing the ball he had in his hands and catching it, and doing the same thing, again and again, because he didn't know what to say, and so did the rest of them. A long pause filled the room, and it started to feel kind of awkward. So again, Will was the one to break the silence.

"You do realize it is nearly impossible to do this, right?"

"It could be!" Mike seemed concerned, as if it had hurt him to hear this.

"It would also cost *a lot* of money." That was Lucas. As much as he loved to bug Mike, he had to be real with him, even if it was not funny right now.

“But you could cheat at tests!” Dustin was smirking, happy to have such a great idea, and ready to use their little project at their advantage.

“And you could get busted!” Lucas’s tone was fakely cheerful, mocking his friends, as the said friends’ face fell down. “That’s a no, as much as I think it could be a superb idea if we were engineers and hella rich.”

Nobody opened up their mouth after that, the morale at its lowest. They were so screwed. The science fair was in a few weeks and they hadn’t come up with anything: it was the first time in years.

“Guys,” everyone groaned as Will spoke, “we could try to shatter glass with soundwaves?”

“How do you intend to do this?” Lucas was still pissed after Mike’s idea. Will’s face sank, and he closed his mouth, not feeling like explaining his idea to the guys anymore. But Mike patted him in the back, hinting that he should continue.

“My mom is seeing this guy who works at the Radio Shack, he’s pretty nice, I guess he could help us, don’t you think?”

“Isn’t your mom with Chief Hopper?” Dustin was chewing on his *croissant* , “I saw her all laughing and happy with him last time,”

“T-That’s not the point! I’m talking about our Science Fair project here, not my mom’s relationships!”

Will and Dustin started fighting, which was pretty unusual because fights often occurred between Dustin and Lucas, or Lucas and Max. They were so loud that they didn’t hear the knock on the basement’s door nor Eléonore walking down the stairs, a plate full of cookies in her hands, and surprised to see the boys argue.

“I made more cookies...?”

Everyone stopped, looking at the small figure standing next to them. Dustin seemed to be now attracted to the cookies as his hand plunged in the plate, grabbing a few cookies, no longer thinking about the argument he just had. But he quickly winced in pain.

“Hot! It’s hot!” He blew on his hand, trying to ease the pain while everyone burst in laughter, holding their ribs and crying. When they finally calmed down, El put down the plate on the center of the same board table the boys used to play on when they were younger. Her hand rested on Mike’s shoulder and his face turned crimson, but only her didn’t notice.

“I’ll go grab Max!” She trailed off, climbing the stairs.

After she was gone, everyone turned to Mike, whose face was still bright red, and Lucas commented. “What a lovely housewife, isn’t she?”



He only earned a punch on his arm, as El was already coming back with the tumultuous redhead, squeezing into their seats, preventing them for talking about the Science Fair coming up. But they didn't care, at least they had a project, and they were all together.

Mike wondered if El considered herself as a part of the Party. He hoped she did, because it was nice to have her around. He looked at her, laughing at something stupid Dustin had said the moment before.

Yes, she definitely a part of them now.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Thank you for reading!

I'll try to work on the next chapter as soon as I can, but I still have homework left (philosophy, ugh, and literature, yay!) so I can't guarantee anything concerning the date the next chapter will be out, sorry :/

Take care!

-Emma

## 5. Kiss and Tell

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hello guys!! I'm back from the dead! Well, not really, but I'm back.

I'm so sorry, I haven't updated in MONTHS, ugh, but school has been crazy: once January starts, they keep putting pressure on us for the baccalaureate, also finding a college or a school to go to... And it's not going to get any better, but hopefully, in mid-June this will all be over, yay!

Personal things happened too, it didn't help.

Anyway, I know I took so long to write this chapter, and it's not even that long, but I hope you'll understand.

I started writing something else, a one-shot actually, and I'll try to finish it as soon as possible. It'll still be about Mileven.

I also have something else in mind but I know I shouldn't start too many things at a time.

Also, thank you from the bottom of my heart for every single kudo and comment, it makes my heart swell <3

Well, I hope you'll enjoy the chapter!

El was talking to him in Spanish but it sounded like Mandarin to him. Today, she was the one helping him. Indeed, he'd helped her with her maths and science homework and she'd insisted on helping him with his Spanish homework after she'd noticed he was completely failing. He didn't want El to know, and he was a bit ashamed of it, so he had asked the guys to not say a thing about it but *of course* Lucas couldn't keep his mouth shut, so right now, she knew and she had offered to

help him in front of the entire Party, which was now making fun of him for blushing and stuttering so much when he'd tried to reply to her.

Fortunately, they were in his basement now, and it was just the two of them. Oddly, it made him even more nervous.

"Now, your turn." El gazed at him firmly, her eyes shining in the dim light of the basement. It seemed like she loved helping other people.

Mike swallowed as El had a more insistent look on her face as silence grew between them. She was waiting for an answer, Mike. Think. *Think* .

"I wasn't really paying attention." Great, now she'll think you don't even care about her helping you and that you're bored with her when it isn't true *at all* .

But, against all odds, she laughed. Okay, so she was making fun of him just like the guys did, and that was worse than everything. Right now, he'd rather be buried deep six feet under the ground. But she eventually stopped giggling, to take a look at him, a more serious expression on, yet she still looked amused as a smile was spreading on her cheeks.

"I know, I was saying bullshit to check if you were listening." El said "bullshit" a lot now, thanks to Lucas who had only this word in his mouth when they would talk about their relationship. Not that they were a thing, they weren't! But Lucas thought quite the contrary, and it fed Mike up. The guy kept constantly asking if they'd already

kissed, all of this in a girl's voice. He didn't dare to do it in El's presence though, and Mike was thankful for that. But Mike was a bit jealous, it was true, but he would *never* admit it to El, or the others. He knew that, if he told someone about it, he would be teased, way more than it was already the case now.

Mike finally replied to her, radically changing the initial subject. "You're here to learn and all you remember are swear words." You could sense he was a bit offended if you were careful to the tone of his voice and, almost immediately, he told himself he should've kept his mouth shut.

Nevertheless, El didn't seem to notice this since she then assured him in a cheerful and jolly voice: "Ah! But don't worry, I also teach him swear words too!" She was laughing now, and even though this sound was pure bliss to his ears, he couldn't help but feel a slight twinge in his heart. Now, it was obvious she was spending time with Lucas, and that they also shared things only between the two of them. He looked up from his notebook he was staring at to avoid El seeing him green with envy, and he saw her smiling face, and he just couldn't help himself but to smile in return when he caught sight of her. Everything about her was contagious.

"He's a lucky guy." His voice was barely a whisper he'd only said to himself, secretly hoping she didn't hear any of this, nor understand. And apparently, his prayers were heard and answered because the young girl added hardly after he just finished, "Shall we go on?", and Mike simply nodded as their last conversation was soon forgotten, or at least, as far as El was concerned, who was trying to help for better or worse, while he, seemed distant.

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The day after, at lunch, Mike was rethinking about the fact that he was going to totally flunk Spanish since he couldn't even concentrate, his thoughts way too cluttered up to work. El eventually noticed and had decided to put an end to their little work session, suspecting that Mike may not want to talk about what was troubling him. And before him, there was a show taking place that was leaving him with no appetite at all. El and Lucas were side by side, and conspicuously, she seemed to have lots of fun because she was bubbling with laughter and Lucas had this annoying smile plastered on his face. Mike laid his eyes on his untouched brocolis sitting in his plate and wiggled them, only this time, it made him gag. Everything was clouded, and he didn't even hear his friend Will sitting by his side calling him.

"Is everything fine?" He was tugging at his shirt to get his friend's attention and smiled when the latter finally looked up from his plate. "You seem a little off... For the past five minutes, all you did was nothing besides playing with your food."

Mike swallowed his saliva while thinking of a perfect lie. When he finally found one, Eléonore's laughter echoed anew in his mind. "I'm just a little tired, that's all." He grabbed his tray firmly with both of his hands after putting his bag on his back, on only one shoulder. "I'm just gonna go now, 'wasn't hungry anyway." It was utterly false. The hour before the meal, his stomach didn't stop making noise and all eyes were on him. But when he thought about yesterday and when he saw what was going on before his eyes, his hunger was quickly forgotten and was replaced by an unpleasant feeling flaring up in his stomach.

He got up without a word and also avoiding his friend's look whom he just lied to and instead he observed El, always so smiling. Once he got out of the cafeteria, he exited the building as quickly as possible without even minding the looks people threw at him. He couldn't

care less. At this moment, he only needed a big bowl of fresh air, otherwise he'd risked getting out all he'd eaten this day, that is his breakfast.

Once he arrived at his favorite place, he laid down on the grass and closed his eyes, trying to forget what was keeping his thoughts busy. In vain, the same image kept playing in his head. Only one question came to his mind: why? Why El? Why was it this girl he'd only known for only a few months that was haunting his every thoughts?

He shook his head, as if to chase his thinking or perhaps to answer his own questions. Either way, it was no use: she was still there, in his head, and didn't seem like she was going anytime soon.

It was only when he heard footsteps approach in the greenery that he thought of something else for a moment. Thousands of scenarios went through his head and honestly, he didn't know which one was worse. He first imagined Troy who'd want to avenge himself from last time, and he'd take him by surprise, because the guy was a coward.

Then, in the other case, he imagined that it would be Lucas, or worse, *El*, coming to confront him about his previous behaviour. Out of fear, he kept his eyelids shut as tight as possible, only concerned about discovering the scene occurring in front of him. The projectile that hit him right in his face pushed him to close his eyes further, and made him whine. That was it, it was Troy coming for him. But it wasn't the brute's voice addressing him.

"You gotta eat." He recognized the slight lisp among thousands.

Mike lifted his head and raised himself up on his elbows. He finally dared to open his eyes and stared at the boy with his beloved hat — which he never took off since he'd met him—, who, in the meantime, had picked up the wrapped brownie he'd just thrown to his face, and handed it to him. Mike simply exhaled loudly while looking at the cake, and whispered: “Told you, I'm not hungry.”

He heard Dustin pester, probably an insult against him, but Mike didn't take it personally. After he'd cursed silently, he shoved it against his friend's chest, encouraging him to take it, because he certainly wouldn't take it back, well, except if his friend was pretty persuasive.

“Mike, eat it,” he sighed, “they said they would kill me if I didn't make you swallow some kind of food, and also if I was the one eating it.” Saying this last sentence, he'd seemed kind of morose...? His eyes were begging for his friend to take the damn cake and eat it, so, by pity for his friend, he seized the little package which was almost glued to him by now. He tore apart the piece of plastic and took a first bite of its content, and he wondered why he didn't do it sooner, so much that the cake was good.

By now, he'd almost forgotten why he hid there in the first place. Mike lifted looked up from his food and sat with his legs crossed Indian style to mimic his friend in front of him, and saw that Dustin was studying him eating, waiting patiently for Mike to finish. The look on his face shifted when he didn't his friend take another bite of what was his meal. Eventually, Mike broke the silence.

“So, you only came down here to feed me?”

Dustin rubbed repetitively his hands against the denim of his

trousers, as if to think about an answer. When he finally stopped his hectic movements, he looked straight in his face and let out a simple “no,” but said nothing more, which irritated Mike. However, when the curly-haired-boy saw his friend’s eyes roll back, clearly reflecting his impatience, he quickly added something else, “I wanted to know what was going on. Will’s right, you see-”

“So now you’re listening to my conversations?”

“No! Well, back there, yes,” he took sight of Mike’s eyes igniting, not in a good way, and tried to save his butt once again. “I’m not the only one noticing, and I’m not just talking about Will!”

Mike watched him out of the corner of his eyes, quiet after what his friend had just said. Dustin continued without even waiting for an answer he knew wouldn’t be coming.

“Seriously, what’s going on? You won’t even eat and pay attention to conversations.”

It was once again a question which lost itself in the wind, and Mike didn’t reply. He seemed distracted again and Dustin swallowed his saliva before asking a question he knew *for sure* Mike wouldn’t react in a good way.

“Is it El?”

When Mike heard her name, his head shot up, eyes full of something



Dustin couldn't put a word on. Still, it confirmed to Dustin that this hassle was caused by her, or at least indirectly. Dustin hesitated before speaking again. "You like her?" He heard him snort.

"What? No!" At least he replied now. Mike threw him a bloodcurdling look. It was a mix between fury, probably because he'd dared to assume this kind of thing, but also a sort of distress. It was followed by a laugh from Mike, who kept repeating "no, no, no..." over and over again, and we could sense the restlessness in his voice. Dustin eyed him suspiciously, only half-believing the statement his friend had made. He tried to reassure him.

"Lucas's not interested."

Wrong choice, it only stirred the fire hiding in his eyes. He got carried away before Dustin could add anything else, even though the latter murmured something which sounded like a "okay, he's definitely got a crush on her," but without Mike hearing it.

"What do you know about it? Have you seen how he acts when she's around, uh?" He seemed down, because talking about it only brought back painful images. Mike didn't stop talking nonsense, and Dustin was getting tired of it.

"Yes, I see it very clearly Mike..." Dustin had to grit his teeth to refrain from spilling the beans. But the ebony-haired boy didn't seem to notice his friend's annoyance, because he went on.

"And El, it's pretty obvious. She keeps talking about him and laugh at every joke he makes, and..." Actually, El talked about Lucas as much

as she did about Max, Will or even Dustin. And also about Mike, but he didn't know about that. He put his head between his hands, still not realizing Dustin had started stomping, growing impatient. He let his hands go through his hair, almost pulling it. Mike was getting on his nerves telling such bullshit. Well, too late. Before he could even retain them, the words were out of his mouth.

"You're really blind, aren't you?" Dustin nearly yelled but at least, it had the merit of shutting Mike, who was now looking at him, mouth hanging and popeyed, astonishment showing on his face. Dustin didn't pay any attention to it and continued as if nothing had just happened. "D-Don't you see that, firstly, Lucas is just trying to be closer to Max, but since she pretends to not give a shit, he makes her jealous by being close to El and that, apparently, it gave her ideas too because she does just the same?" He finished his sentence totally out of breath, talking so damn fast without even taking the time to breath. He was now studying his friend while catching his breath. It was only now that Dustin seemed to become aware of what he'd just did and covered his mouth with his right hand whereas the left one collided with his forehead, and he murmured quietly, "Oh shit, I should've kept my mouth shut."

After a few minutes, the time for Mike to process all the information his friend had just divulged, he spoke again, rather calmly and with a low voice. "How do you know all of this? How come you know so many things and clearly, I'm the only one not knowing what the fuck is going on, huh?" His last sentence was much louder than he'd wanted it to be, betraying the mask he'd put on to appear at peace.

Dustin swallowed his saliva, once again, but more slowly, before responding, slowly as well. However, his voice was inaudible and Mike had to force him to speak louder.

“W-When you guys were visiting Indianapolis with El last time... We winded up with Will and Lucas —without Max. And he confessed he was in love with Max, or at least liked her very very much, h-he asked for advice.” He knew Mike would kill him once his next sentence would be out of his mouth, well, not literally, but he was scared of his giant friend. He gulped, hard. “Consequently,” Dustin used to say big words only when he was stressed out, or tried to impress someone, or when he was so fucking scared. Today, it might have been for those three reasons. “I told him what Steve, Harrington,” he specified, and swallowed again, “what, hum, Steve Harrington once had told me to do if I ever wanted to... get a girl... Which basically means you have to act like you don’t care, too, and eventually make her jealous by showing interest to another girl,” he paused to, once again, swallow his saliva and finished his sentence, lowering his voice and eyes to avoid Mike’s ones, “in this case, El.” He coughed a bit, clearing his throat and finally looked up. Seeing his friend’s look, Dustin quickly added something that might save him from his friend’s wrath. “B-But the idea wasn’t from me, okay, it’s from Steve! And Lucas had the choice, you know! I mean, he could’ve chosen Will advice, but no, he went for mine, uh, Steve’s.” He corrected himself with a nervous laugh escaping his lips, but still smiled to his friend in an attempt to ease him *and* to calm him down. Unfortunately, it didn’t seem to work. Mike, who was usually as white as a sheet, was now red, and Dustin just knew it wasn’t the good kind of red, such as when his friend caught a glimpse of El. No, now, he knew he just wouldn’t be able to forget what was about to happen. Or he thought so.

But, much to his surprise, Mike was relaxed when he opened his mouth to speak. “First of all, why do I just hear about it now? Friends don’t lie, remember! Secondly, if you gave Steve’s advice, it’s still coming from you to Lucas’s mind.” He took a deep breath, biting his lips before wetting them, and carried on. “But, above all: why El? Why use her? All you wanted to do was scare her?” And there it was again, still coming back to El. Dustin didn’t know if Mike noticed, but he couldn’t help pointing it out.

“Dude, first, she’s not made of sugar, and then, we knew you liked her, there’s no need to shout it from the rooftops or something,” to which Mike couldn’t help stopping whatever he was doing, and added, “No, I’m just concerned about her.”

Dustin rolled his eyes, annoyed by his friend’s denial. He decided to reassure him. “But Mike, El knows about Lucas’s plan, she’s helping him, sort of,” but instead of having the intended effect on his friend, it had seemed to have offended him.

“So, she knows, really?” He had said while taking a bite of his cake he’d put aside: he really needed it at this moment. Dustin simply shrugged, as if it wasn’t a big deal, which was the case, but not for Mike. “For Christ’s sake, am I the only idiot who doesn’t know shit about any of this?”

Dustin was surprised at Mike’s cussing, since he was usually one to hate cursing, probably because he had a little sister at home, so he was taught not to do it, but even when children weren’t around, he’d avoid it, all contrary to Dustin, who was known for cursing like a sailor. Anyhow, he eventually replied to his friend, not leaving him hanging any longer. “Well, no, Max doesn’t know either,” Dustin hesitated, “El really knows how to keep a secret.” He’d said that like he admired her, and Mike winced.

“Yeah, well you don’t.” His response was deprived of any sensibility and with that, he got up and took his bag, walking away at a fast pace. Dustin followed right after, getting up and gathering all his things scattered on the grass, including the remains of the brownies Mike had eaten. He caught up with him, jogging on the freshly mown football field. As he was only a few meters away from his friend, he let out a grumbling with a breath, in passing, the only one left in his lungs. “Mike, stop being so impulsive. You know I’m always having a

hard time following you when you're leaving like this..." The only reply he got was a jaded and steamed look before Mike started walking again towards the bikes. Subsequently, he intended to head home. Even so, Dustin was still on his heels, and, when Mike sat on his saddle, Dustin said something like: "And besides, you were the one insisting on knowing about this! I know how to keep a secret when we don't make me admit it!". Mike's sole reply was a pedal stroke, putting distance between him and his concerns.

Dustin let out a long sigh and mumbled something before he turned back to people who, them, at least, wouldn't run away from them with their bike.

He kicked a small rock getting in his way, sending it right on the football field and couldn't help smiling when he imagined a stupid jock grazing his knee on their normally oh so perfect lawn. When he finally re-entered the main building, he discovered his two friends, whom he'd just lost against at short straw. They were waiting for him, arms crossed, eyebrows raised and studied him, attempting to draw conclusions by just looking at his face. And he lost it.

"Crap, Lucas! Your plan is just crap! H-He ran away, *whoosh*, gone!" Dustin was pacing and agitating his arms. Will put an end to it by putting one hand on his shoulder and hushed a simple "stop it." Lucas, hot-blooded by nature, was now blustering too.

"Dude! You blew the whistle! We really can't trust you!"

"You're a jackass too, you shouldn't have hidden things from him in the first place! He has the right to know!"

Without even taking time to understand, Lucas instantly bit back. “And you’re saying my plan is crap, but you should’ve found a less crappy one! A-A-And I still can’t believe you told him *everything* !”

While they wouldn't stop shouting at each other, Will whispered their names, attempting to get their attention, because, speaking of which, all eyes were on the feud taking place at the end of the corridor. Students were starting to form a circular arc around the three friends, including two of them arguing loudly and even started pushing each other. A pupil shouted “fight!”, and every single other student did too, like a sort of chant. Seeing that this didn't change a thing about the two boys' behaviour, Will gathered all the strength buried deep inside of him and finally managed to split them up, not without any difficulties, while screaming their names, and this once, it made them turn their heads towards him. They were wide-eyed, as if they didn't believe they were about to fight in front of hundreds of students, all of this because of silly things. They both swallowed their saliva, panting and murmuring apologies to one another. Lucas turned around, surprised to see the crowd staring at them with a hint of disappointment in their eyes.

“There's nothing to see, get lost!” And, based on the tone of his voice, they guessed he wasn't kidding and the students scattered: some went to class, some others watched the boys out of the corner of their eyes while whispering in their ears. The scene filled Lucas with anger; he wasn't just some puppet putting on a show for the audience. He took one last glimpse of the eyes that were still staring at them, and then decided it'd be better to leave this place.

That's how they ended up in a peaceful place which happened to be the bicycle storage. Will was the first one to speak.

“So you really weren't joking, his bike isn't here anymore,” he

commented silently, acknowledging the missing bike. There was indeed a blank space between Will and Dustin's bikes — Lucas went to school with his own car, now. Dustin nodded before saying something.

"Yeah, well, where were we?"

"Well, you know, you were saying my plan was crap and also, you told Mike everything, remember?" His response was a highly bitter one and, seeing that Dustin was rolling back his eyes, Will felt the urge to interfere.

"Guys. Stop it."

Lucas and Dustin turned their heads to their friend, once again being the mediator. He didn't want his two friends to fight again. Thank goodness, it was enough to cut short any tension forming in the air.

"So, I was saying," Dustin stressed the last words, looking at his friends with a certain insistence, his eyes burning holes, "that Mike got the fuck out of there after I attempted to tell him that, no, you weren't gonna steal his girlfriend!"

Lucas snorted at that.

"She's not his girlfriend," Will said that quietly, and Dustin rolled his eyes and you could've almost heard it if it were possible.

“It might as well be! Always looking at each other and hanging out together and-”

“They live together...”

“Well, thanks, I know, but it doesn't explain the fact that it is pretty obvious!” He had his arms in the air, ostensibly peeved by his friend's excuses.

“Well, Dustin's right, Will. Whatever Mike is saying: it's bullshit, like, he's always drooling whenever she's around. El too, she's simply more low-key.” Lucas was less confident at the end of his comment, but apparently, it was enough for Dustin to squeal, yes, *squeal*, as if he just won a prize.

“Ah-ah! You see! Told ya!” He had taken Will by the shoulders and just shook him before releasing a buzzed Will. However, with way less excitement in his voice, he added, “But do you know the best part?” He paused for a few seconds, not really expecting anything from Lucas nor Will, but he just wanted to build up the suspense, if there was any. “He's denying all of this! He fucking denies it!” He cleared his throat and tried to fake Mike's voice, a bit lower than his. “No! I don't like El, it's not true! Our relationship is purely platonic and it will stay that way!” He'd said all this while motioning with his hands as if they were puppets. The little show couldn't help but make them smile, almost laugh, even though Will was trying to not sneak into his best friend's private life. (Of course, he'd withhold telling him.)

After he'd stop chuckling, Lucas tried to look serious once again and



glanced between his two friends and spoke when he saw they weren't amused anymore. "El's also denying."

He'd earned clueless faces from his mates and before he even had the time to go on, he was swarmed by questions. Dustin's ones to be precise.

"How do you know? Did El tell you? What did she sound like when she was lying?" He was talking as fast as he could, looking forward having answer from Lucas. If he knew, he had to tell them, but what was taking him so much time? He was really being a pain in the ass to him today. His inwardness told him to be patient, but he just suspected Lucas was doing it on purpose. When he was ready to clap his hands before his eyes, or snap his fingers at him, Lucas spoke again, his voice less confident and strangely shy.

"Max told me."

Lucas immediately resented himself, feeling like he'd just betrayed the redhead. He was expecting teasing from his friends — well, especially Dustin — but was reassured when he became aware that the latter didn't seem to care at this moment.

"Fuck! Of course! I-I'm so dumb!" He didn't notice Lucas nodding at that. "Girls tell each other everything!" He was right, he knew it, and a stroke of genius arose in his head. Dustin was taking the padlock off his bike and threw it somewhere in his bag without even bothering with closing it. "Guys," he turned around towards them, a foot on the treadle. "Max is definitely compelling El to know if there's something going on with Mike! We should do the same!" And with that, he ran away without even waiting for his friends.

Behind, Lucas hurried up to get his bike, and gestured for Will to do the same, even though he seemed more unwilling. "Lucas, I don't think it's a good idea..." He murmured as he carefully took a seat on his bicycle. Lucas, on the other hand, didn't bother with it and started pedaling without even sitting, which made his bike swing from side to side every time he'd push the treadle.

"I don't even care if it's a good idea or not! I only want Mike to wake up and stop being a wuss! And Will, c'mon, it's the fifth period, who cares!" He shouted every word while running away to catch up with Dustin, who was now becoming a dot in the horizon. Will eventually brought himself to do the same thing, afraid he could not reduce the distance between his friends and him if they were too far ahead. Thus, pedaling with all of his might, breathless and panting, he shouted to his friends. "Stop being so impulsive!"

Further, as the second bell had just rung, El was staring at the empty seat next to her. Usually, Mike was here and they often spent the hour exchanging words, looks and smiles rather than listening to the old lady who pretended to be an historian. Where was he? She hadn't seen him since he'd left the huge room where everyone ate. She'd wanted to go after him but everyone had refused, saying he probably wanted to be left alone, so instead, she went with Max. By the way, the redhead who normally sat behind her just put her jacket on the back of Mike's chair, and crashed in it, rather than sat, which startled El. Max mumbled something El didn't understand completely, but there were definitely insults somewhere in all this gibberish. At last, the girl in person jerked her head up and smiled to El, who instantly smiled back. Max rapidly became her friend and, as cliché as it sounded, it was her that she'd tell about all her little stories. El was about to ask her if she'd seen Mike, but she stopped when she eavesdropped a conversation between the two girls sitting before them. With her eyebrows raised, she got slightly closer.

“Have you seen the fight earlier?” It was a blonde haired-girl in a cheerleader uniform who said that to her friend, who was also wearing the same outfit. Contrary to her friend, she was dark-skinned and had brown hair.

The latter stopped filing her nails to reply to her friend. “It wasn’t a fight, Brit, they only poked each other.” She sighed, and smacked her lips before she talked again. “I wouldn’t have believed Sinclair and Henderson were chickens.”

She huffed for what seemed to be an eternity to El. She was dying to know if Mike were with them or not. Then, the latina resumed. “They probably didn’t want to scare Byers.” Both girls giggled, which annoyed El and Max, who was now listening too. El had to know more, by any means necessary.

“What about Wheeler?” She’d bend over the table, between their heads. Irritation could be seen on the brunette’s face, but there was misunderstanding on the blonde’s. Sighted the girls’ expressions, Max had made El sit back in her chair, but her eagerness remained.

“Wheels...? There were no wheels, San, huh?” The blonde girl looked at her friend as if only she could tell her. Her friend sighed before putting down her nail file and took her friend’s hand, drawing invisible circles as if to comfort her.

“No, Brit, you know, Wheeler, Mike Wheeler?”

Her friend’s face lit up, and a dirty smile was now on her mouth. “Oh, him!” She chortled once more along with her friend.

“Ah, if only he were more popular... What a pity, it’s such a waste...” She sighed before laying her eyes on El, who didn’t look like she appreciated the little exchange going on between the two stuck-ups, as Max would call girls like them. “So yeah, Wheeler?” Her gaze was now similar to an Ice Queen’s. El gulped as Max still observed her closely.

“He wasn’t there?” She was anxious, you could sense it and Max couldn’t wait to point it out to her. But this would be later.

“Huh-huh,” it was the blonde who’d replied, shaking her head before she turned around just like her friend did as soon as she did what she was being asked to. Whereas the two cheerios resumed their conversation as if nothing had happened, El still had questions coming from all sides of her head.

Why did Mike left?

Was it because of her?

Did she do something wrong?

Was it the reason why they didn’t let her go see him?

Why were Lucas and Dustin about to fight?

Where were they? They're supposed to be here, with them.

But above all: where was Mike?

It was as if Max had read her mind because she drew closer to El and she whispered softly. "I'm sure they're fine." She paused, glanced at her teacher who seemed to be way too passionate about the Great Depression. "I'm sure *he's* fine. He must've went home. Don't worry." And with a smile as well as a little pressure on her hand, Max started to take notes. El, now reassured, did the same, or else, how Mike could ever catch up?

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Thank you for reading!

I won't be able to update for a while since I'll either be studying, taking exams or travelling, and since it won't be in Europe, I won't have any data :/ It doesn't mean I won't write though!

See you next time!

-Emma